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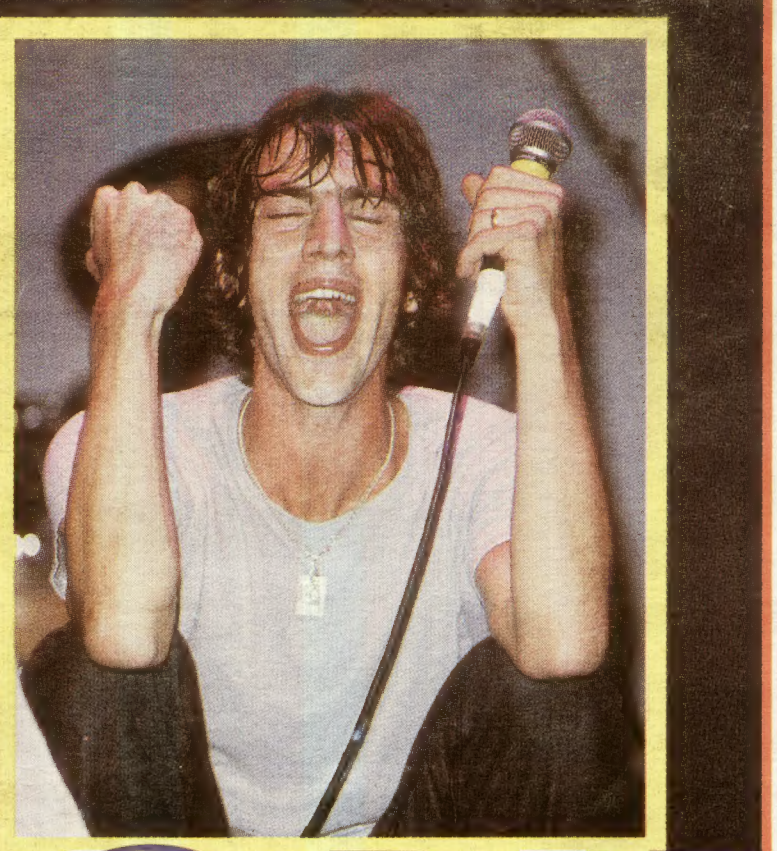


OASIS and THE VERVE
Three nights out with the lads at Earls Court

COME ON!

FREE INSIDE: LARGE OASIS SOUVENIR POSTER

Photography: Ian Jennings

NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS NME REVIEWS

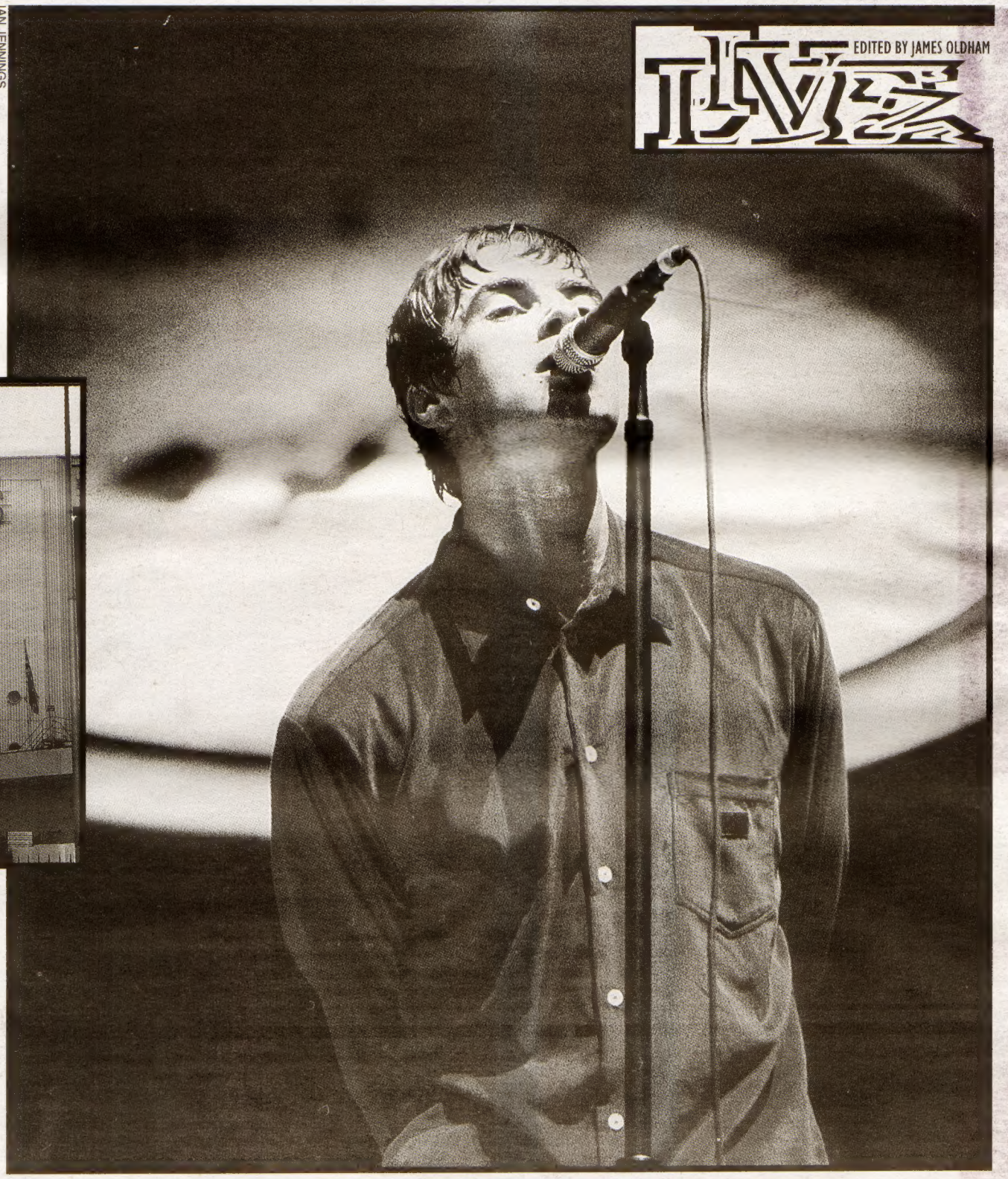
THIS WEEK'S TRIPLE-STRENGTH RECORDS AND LIVE REVIEWS

LIVE: *Pages 42–52*, LONG PLAYS: *Pages 54–57*, SINGLES: *Pages 60 & 61*

EARL POWER!

● After the mega success of last year's monster Knebworth gigs, OASIS decided to bring it all back home to Earls Court for the 'Be Here Now' tour and to invite their mates, THE VERVE, along for the party. Two great bands for the price of one! How could we resist? *NME* attended all three nights; PAUL MOODY, STEVEN WELLS and guest reviewer, the infamous novelist WILL SELF, get close enough to see the whites of Liam's eyes.

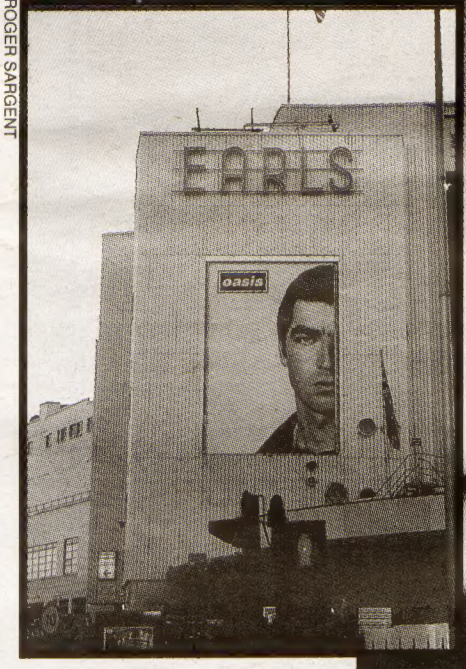
IAN JENNINGS



LIVE — EDITED BY JAMES OLDHAM

THURSDAY

ROGER SARGENT



"ARE YA mad for it? I'm fookin' mad for it!"

Nearly two years, one near-split, and several billion record sales on from the last time we were all gathered here to witness the phenomenon they call Oasis (no statistics, please, they're *big* alright?) and all, on first sight, appears to be how they left it: bold-as-brass singalongs, post-baggy leisurewear as far as the eye can see and that traditional brand of Burnage bonhomie. The jewellery's just got bigger, that's all. Strewn out across the stage like multicoloured figures from an ancient game of pub football, the four who aren't Liam assume their positions, roll on their heels, and set about being the most important rock group in the world.

Guigsy still looks like he's just crawled out of bed and forgotten someone gave him two black eyes last night. Bonehead stands waxwork-still inside his oversized shirt and cranes his neck to the left occasionally. Alan White puts the fear of McCarroll into his kit and Noel, well, he goes about the business of knocking out the songs that have given him the unquestionable right to own so many guitars.

Welcome back to a world, then, where *we've* all been for the last two years. Ever since '(What's The Story) Morning Glory?' became as much a part of British culture as afternoon tea and inner-city squalor, the thought that Oasis might ever be anything other than what they, er, be, on this latest tour of 'intimate' venues was difficult to imagine. I mean, an experimental drum'n'bass excursion? A Mancunian collaboration with Mick Hucknall on 'Inner City Blues'? A jazzy interlude where Liam'n'Patsy canoodle through an updated 'Je T'Aime'? (now there's a thought...)

Everything you might envisage to occur at an Oasis show happens. Toddlers scurry around with mums'n'dads around the merchandise stall and plead to be brought a set of two matching pin badges (touchingly, available for a quid). Armies of builders contemplate buying an Oasis towel (£22) for their told-to-stay-at-home girlfriends. Gangs of mini-Liams prowl the edges of the cavernous arena looking for beer.

Oasis' highest point may have passed (Knebworth, inevitably) but their effect on where pop goes in their wake, either in love or loathing, is set in stone. Where the outside world heads for is another thing.

But not, for tonight at least, in the direction of The Verve.

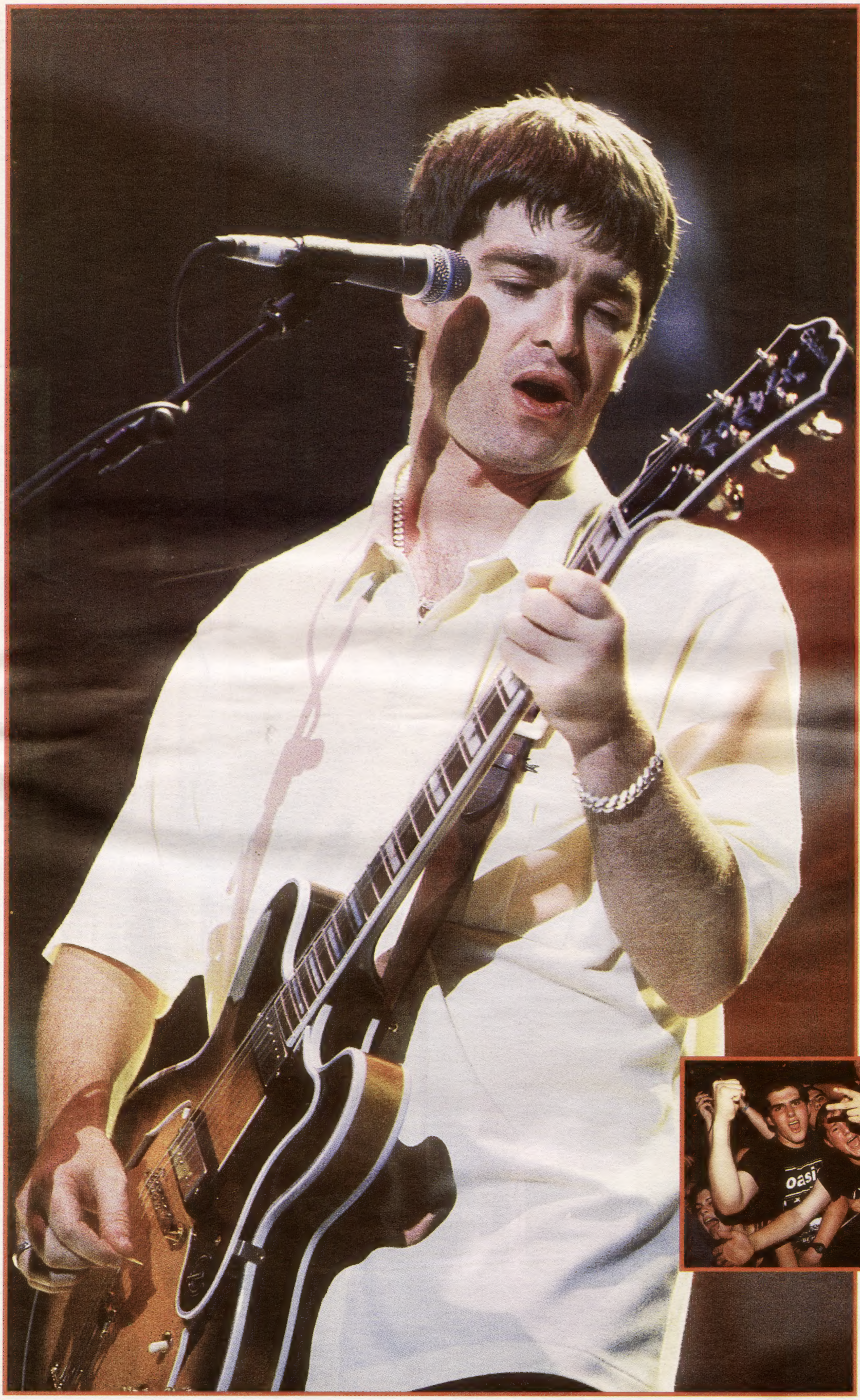
Before half of the crowd have even considered the idea of leaving the confines of the pub round the corner, The Verve are onstage – at an absurdly early 7pm – and showing us that fresh from their Number One slot, they've now found a constituency who, according to those in the know, appreciate Oasis' belligerent blood and thunder but crave a little more *gravitas*. Clearly, however, this news hasn't filtered down to the rank and file, judging by the blank looks and huge crowds around the bars prompted by The Verve's appearance.

Let it be made clear: tonight at least, for all the high-talk during the week leading up to the show about their chances of stealing the carpet from underneath their mentors, they remain firmly in their place. Even Richard Ashcroft, not a man known for his onstage reserve, appears to have grasped the mood and tailors his actions accordingly.

Dwarfed by a sound brought on by a half-full auditorium and what appears to be a succession of psychedelic paper doilies projected onto the screen behind him, he leads the band through the highlights of 'Urban Hymns' and allows us to come to terms with the vast oval-shaped screens that tower either side of the stage. 'The Rolling People' for one, retains a nonchalance in such surroundings which suggests it was built for heady nights such as these, but it's only two thirds of the way through their set, where the lights dip and the triumphalist swell of 'Bitter Sweet Symphony' starts up, that anybody besides the hardcore take any real notice.

"Come on!" roars Richard inevitably at its conclusion, at which point hordes of new converts, moving *en masse* in a rumble of desert boots and an eye-watering fog of Calvin Klein aftershave, duly raise their arms in the air and roar "Come on!" back by way of approval. A moral victory.

After which follows a short break, the regulation airing of The La's' 'There She Goes' over the PA and then they're



IAN JENNINGS

on, striding through that oversized telephone box and running through their back catalogue like there's a tornado coming our way via the dressing room. 'Be Here Now', a sprightly 'Stay Young' (treated to a huge spine-tingling terrace chorus crowd chant of, *"We know just what we are"*), a double-strength 'Stand By Me'... they all whizz by with the dawning realisation that, for all the carping, Noel's songwriting, and the strain of genius running through 'Be Here Now', is as strong as it ever was.

"How ya doin'?... I know it cost a bit of money..." burbles Liam at its close – he has the air of a lunatic throughout – before Noel whips out a deadly 'Supersonic', a stunning 'Some Might Say' (forget the snobs; for the thousands here tonight that is the key Oasis song) and a bigger-than-Jesus 'Roll With It', ushered in by Noel cawing: "The last time we played this one here the neighbours complained... so let's take the fookin' roof off this time!"

Liam, meanwhile, takes on the manner of a deranged and slightly terrifying PE teacher by bawling "Come on!" throughout to reassert his complete mad-fer-it credentials. By the time they've skittled through Noel's solo spot, during which even 'Magic Pie' manages to sound good, buoyed along by thousands of tone-deaf renditions stage-front, it's clear that any notion of them having lost the faith of the legions assembled here is stuff and nonsense.

As for the dedications: 'D'You Know What I Mean?' gets accredited to The Verve, 'Wonderwall' goes to Ma Gallagher and 'Live Forever', inevitably, considering the furore it's provoked, to "the Princess".

Dues duly paid, the heat gets turned up. 'It's Gettin' Better (Man!!)', a turbo 'Champagne Supernova', and a wild thrash at 'Fade In-Out' all hit a central nerve and prove that beyond the beery bravado, there's still an inarticulable fury running through the band, until a sluggish 'All Around The World' draws proceedings to a halt. Only for Oasis to return for a thoroughly pissed-off 'Acquiesce', at the close of which Noel scowls something unintelligible involving "c—s" and Liam prowls the stage looking for something to destroy. He finally settles for swinging a left footer at his sibling's mic-stand, which goes toppling to the floor amid a haze of feedback. Utter genius.

And what else, really, could we expect of a group who can make people who don't even like music like music?

ROGER SARGENT

Fireworks? (we get those too, incidentally, in full Technicolor at all the right moments).

Still ruling, then. Still kings of the wide frontier. Still, amazingly enough, in touch.

Paul Moody

CONTINUES OVER

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

FRIDAY

"COCAINE!" SCREAMS a wag outside Earls Court tube station, "I'm buying and selling *cocaine!*"

"All them f—ing bastards who f—ing slagged us off can stick it up their f—ing arse!" spits Liam, his pretty face twisted in genuine hurt, his little fists clenched until the knuckles creak, his skinny torso tensed like whipcord.

This isn't just pop music. This is war. The next big thing versus the last big thing. Soulful poetry versus blowtorch doggerel. Fops against rockers.

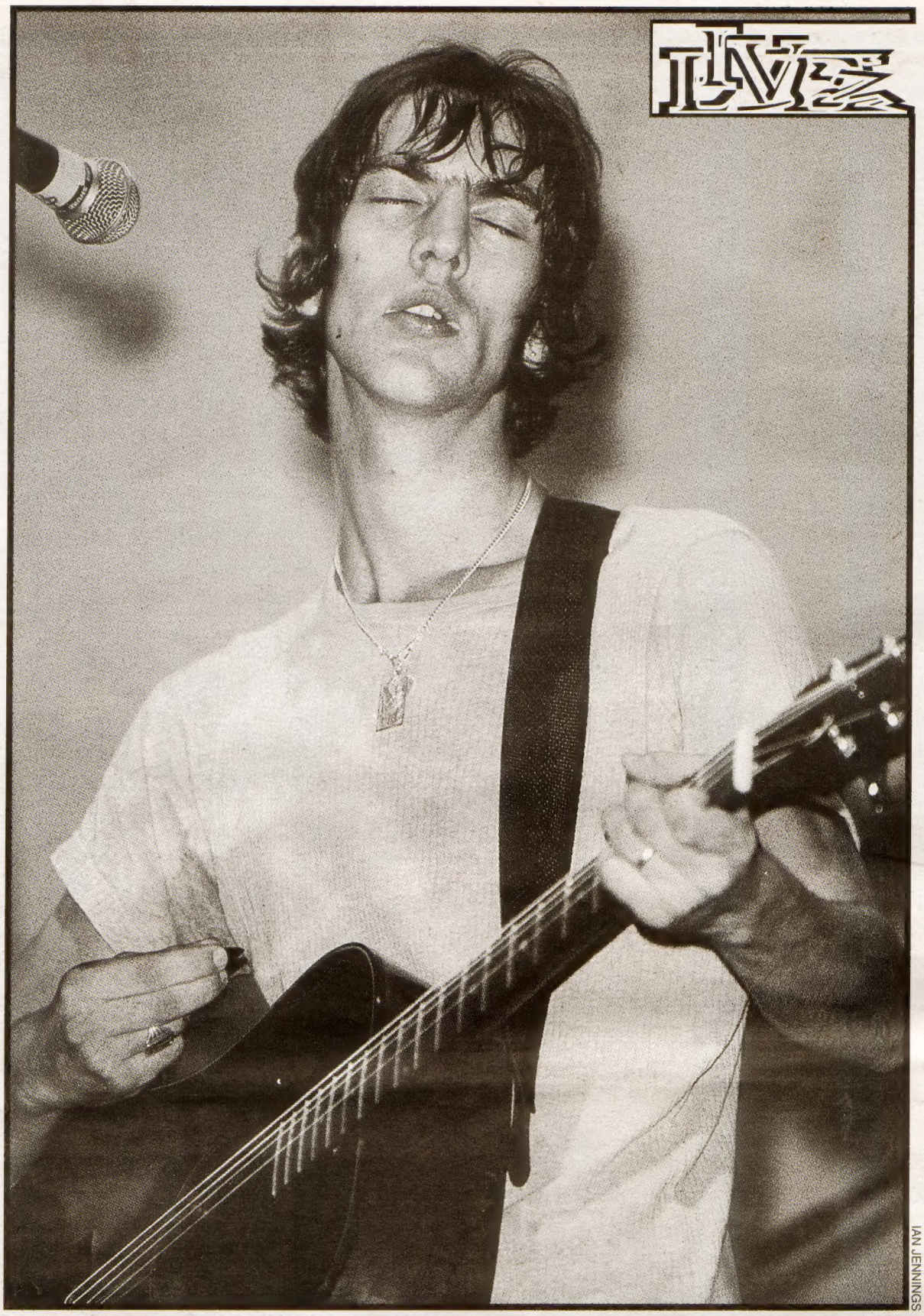
It could've been an anti-climax – two eunuchs fighting over a punctured condom. It turned out a bloody massacre, a wipeout, a savagely one-sided, show-no-mercy, total f—ing slaughterhouse. And it was *glorious!*

The Verve are hot favourites. Those of us who consider 'Urban Hymns' to be a flat, turgid and stupefyingly tedious exercise in self-pitying 'Candle In The Wind'-style emotional masturbation are in a tiny minority. Oasis are in the dog house. Arrogant attempts to bully an already cowed media are being made to look even more grotesque by the growing realisation that 'Be Here Now' is a pitifully weak offering. The throne totters. The crown slips. The mob surges, murmurs and groans in anticipation of the world turned upside down. This is smart-bomb technology versus clubs and spears. Oasis are about to be blasted back into the Stone Age.

If you've read the gushing hype then you'll know that Richard Ashcroft pulls open his ribcage, plucks out his battered heart and squeezes it until it spurts dark poetry. If you haven't, then you could be forgiven for thinking that he's just a skinny hippy with an average voice who enjoys picking his emotional scabs in public. Instead of the genuinely gutwrenching, heartstopping and brainshattering eloquence of a Hamlet or a Mark Anthony we get instead the twitchy, rodent-like self-obsessed neurotic scrabblings of a Woody Allen – but without the jokes.

Where Ashcroft should scream he merely whines. In place of dynamics we are offered monotone. This isn't elegant melancholy, this is mope-on-a-rope. This isn't the mocking slap and tickle of pop, this isn't the howling thunder of rock, this isn't even the theatrically painful ecstasy of genuine soul (have you ever *heard* Aretha Franklin, James Brown or Otis Redding?). This is something *other*. Something small, pale, white and withered. Pop aborted at the foetal stage. The Verve have successfully updated the worst aspects of po-faced early-'70s me-generation wank rock and combined them with the current hideous fashion for morbid introspection.

But let's not be negative. The first 15 seconds of 'Bitter Sweet Symphony' are amusing (until that looped violin riff starts to set the teeth on edge) and, at the very end of tonight's set, The Verve blow their cool, suddenly seem to forget their lofty disdain for enthusiasm, excitement and exhilaration, and actually start to *rock out!* Steel is glimpsed through the swirling dope smoke. It's too little, too late. In half-an-hour it'll seem like they never even played.



IAN JENNINGS

More than one critic has kicked the shit out of Oasis in recent weeks. They've deserved it. Arrogant twats. It seems to have worked. Liam leaves the giant phone box boiling with rage. Oasis are wired but Liam, Liam is on fire. It's like the final reel of *Rocky II*. Liam twitches and spasms. He screams inarticulate abuse at his detractors like an educationally subnormal Othello and flails at the air in impotent fury. His Frankie Howerd-lookalike brother and the rest of the Oasis dustbin men fade into the background. Liam crackles with sex, hunger and potential violence. Like he could shit a dozen Richard Ashcroft's before breakfast. *This* is pop. *This* is rock. *This* is soul. This, please note, is ENTERTAINMENT! How frightfully uncool.

Within minutes Liam's fringe is plastered to his brow with sweat and his microphone drips with spittle. Noel's rinky-dinky little pop songs might form the solid backbone of Oasis' appeal, but it's Liam's voice – that constant, scorching howl – that provides the teeth. That makes Oasis truly special. It's the sound of a bottle bank dropped off a towerblock, a flame thrower barking into a concrete bunker. It reminds you of hollering Noddy Holder, howling Ozzie Osbourne and caterwauling Kurt Cobain. It's the sound of Paul McCartney insanely piledriving through 'Dizzy Miss Lizzy' while speeding out of his quiffed box in a Hamburg nightclub. Tonight that voice makes the mediocre songs seem brilliant and the brilliant songs sound painfully awesome.

The difference between The Verve and Oasis is stark. The Verve are defeatist, anal and neurotic. They stink of failure. Oasis are blustering, arrogant, oafish dreamers. The Verve feverishly sniff their own stools while Oasis claw clumsily at the stars. They *rage* against the dying of the light. They give inarticulate but wholly eloquent voice to those – like the sacked Liverpool dockers and their families who have a stall here tonight – who kick against the pricks, who fight and keep on fighting because the alternative is to wallow in shit. The best The Verve can offer is the soul-sucking topography of stunted adolescent despair.

Leon Trotsky, writing about the explosion of deranged art that followed in the wake of the Russian Revolution, wrote: "This new art is incompatible with pessimism, with scepticism and with all other forms of spiritual collapse. It is realistic, active, vitally collectivist and filled with the limitless creative faith in the future." He would have loved Oasis tonight.

Oasis are not, never have been and never will be 'the greatest rock band in the world'. They're a pop band. They're the '90s equivalent of Slade. Which is to say that they are a brilliant, one-trick, strictly short-term, superficial little butterfly of a band whose intensely stupid, brilliantly banal, utterly addictive and uplifting songs will be loved, played and remembered long after The Verve have been consigned to the dustbin of pop history.

On tonight's performance, Oasis are patently 'the *second* best band in Britain' and have obviously won the right to claim first dibs on the support slot for the Spice Girls' first UK tour. That's the real battle. Tonight's contest was a farce.

The Premier League awaits.

Steven Wells

CONTINUES PAGE 46

catatonia
I am the mob
OUT NEXT WEEK
Blanco Y Negro

FROM PAGE 44

SATURDAY

IT WAS an emotional night for me – as it was for many others. The minute that Liam Gallagher reached the centre of the enormous, cod-surrealist set at Earls Court, I knew that we were in a situation of life meld. He was dressed entirely in white, stretchy clothing, which made him appear as if he were wearing a colossal Baby-Gro. Then he took up his posture at the microphone: arms clenched behind the small of his back, legs akimbo, and began to push, and push, and pu-ush! Wrenchingly giving birth to the words, *"All my people right here right now – jewknowwhatImean..."*.

Approximately 24 hours before – and time is, of course, of the essence when discussing all this – I had been assisting my wife to adopt exactly the same position as Liam: the upper body tilted forward, the arse end pushed back. But she wasn't holding a tambourine, and was giving birth not to pop history, but to Ivan Self (eight-and-a-half pounds).

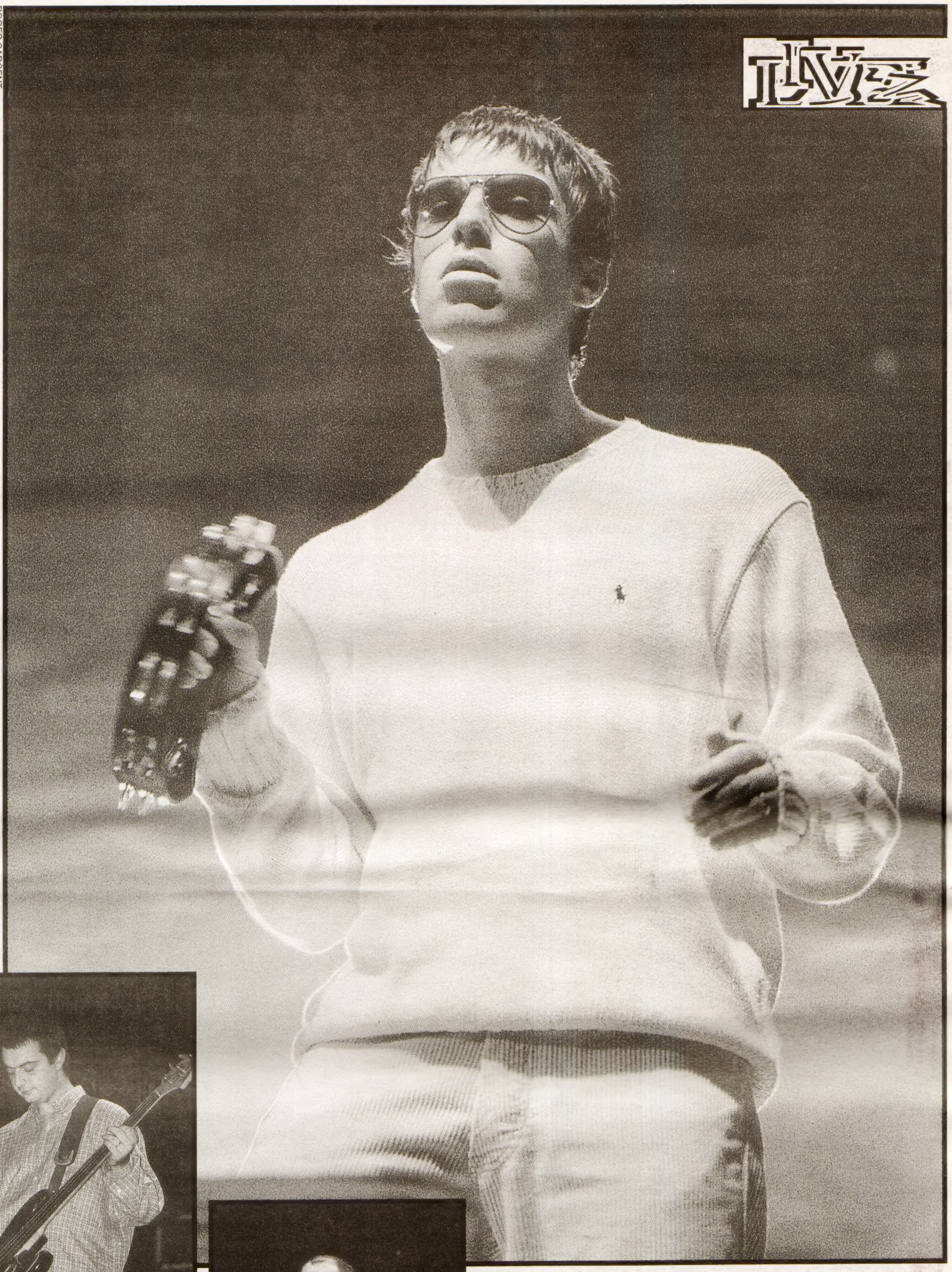
I wonder what Liam will do when his first child is born? You can just imagine him dealing with the midwives: "Is that great big thing gonna come out of her f—in' fanny? That's top, our kid..."

Arguably, all of Liam's singing career has been an anticipation of this moment. I certainly felt this as I watched him bend in the spotlight – that he was dressed in a Baby-Gro only served to underline it, as did the two enormous ovoid monitors that flanked the stage. These beamed pictures of Liam and Noel contorting their monobrows, as if they were in the process of being squeezed out of some giant uterus.

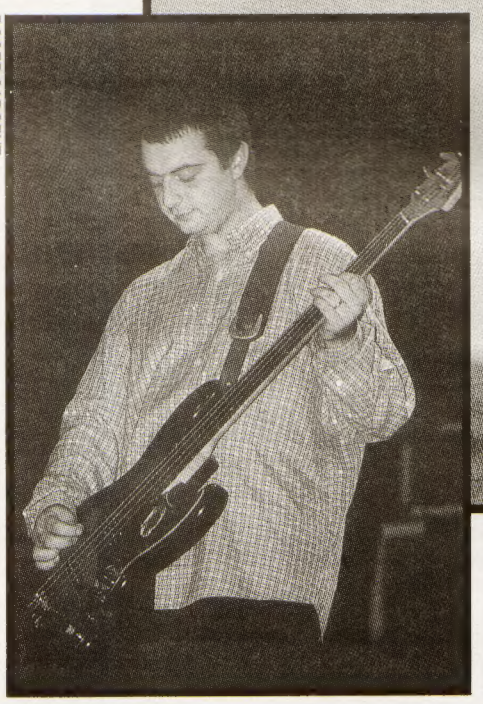
Alright, I knew where I was when they were getting high – getting completely f—ing wasted myself. Pint after pint after pint of frothy Carlsberg disappeared down my neck as the band belted on. It's probably the best means of producing piss in the world.

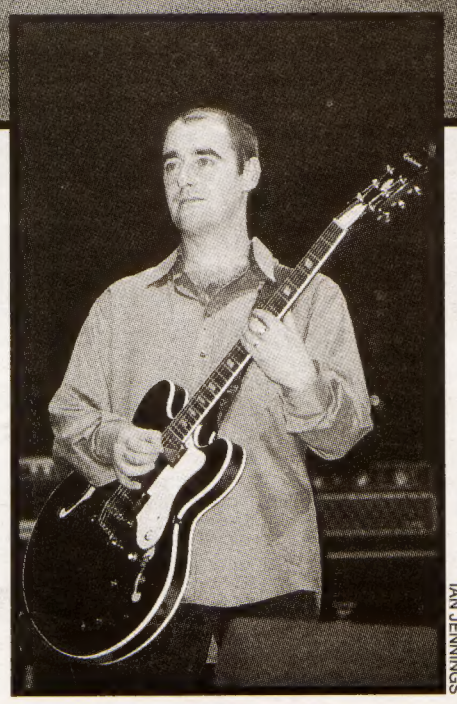
Carlsberg had the concession closest to the VIP section of Earls Court; and I may be long in the tooth but I've never seen this before; two ranks of bar staff, one lot pouring pints and setting them up, the other lot handing them to the punters. It was the famous Wall Of Lager (presumably the closest Oasis get to Phil Spector).

In truth the mix must have been calibrated from the mixing desk itself, which at Earls Court is some 100 metres from the stage. Where I was – about a 100ft from the stage – the noise was so loud, so throbbing, that my trousers actually vibrated against my legs.



ROGER SARGENT


ROGER SARGENT


IAN JENNINGS

The Dali-inspired set itself, with its tilted objects – phone booth, clock, padded bar – was equipped with lights that curved up and round to form yet another shape suggestive of intimate, feminine anatomy. I've got to hand it to them – it was awesome. Whatever one's overall doubts about the status of Oasis' work to date, on Saturday night at Earls Court, even a cynic such as myself could believe that he was in at the birth of rock history.

Certainly the fans felt that way. Coming up Warwick Avenue to the venue, the atmosphere among the throngs of casually dressed people was only comparable to that of election night in May. They were elated and chattering and moaning.

I found it beautifully ironic that these quintessential working-class heroes were doing a stadium gig, the success of which was severely predicated on divisiveness; we, the elect, were allowed a special pit at the front of the auditorium, while the masses, the Great Unwashed, were allocated to the back. Well done boys. This is what you worked for all this time: to create a situation where the privileged are yet more privileged and the paying punters are herded like cattle.

The gig began with some geezer in the costume of a doorman at the Ritz – shades of Di-Dodi death there – running about the stage like the white rabbit, frenziedly reacting to the ticking of an outsize clock. When the hour struck and the band emerged, the entire audience went mental. And they stayed that way for the next couple of hours, while Liam knelt, strained, strolled, struck attitudes, and Bonehead remained utterly and incontrovertibly static.

They played a set that neatly interleaved the new album and the great, anthemic hits. Oasis aren't just a band that adapts well to stadium venues, they are a band whose music is purpose-built for stadiums, coming as it does from the chorus line tradition of, *"'Ere we go, 'ere we go, 'ere we go..."*

I'm not saying the boys weren't good or anything – they manifestly were: no prima donna-ish antics from the 'Brothers Grim', only appeals to the 'fans' to stop pointing laser torches in their eyes, and exhortations to give generously to the striking Liverpool dockers who were collecting outside – but my attention was focused mostly on the crowd.

This was the real story: the forest of arms, the glazed eyes, the thousands of mouths synching in perfect time: *"'Coz after allll... you're mywonderwa-all..."* Critics may carp, posterity may condemn, but for two hours I watched rock fervency at its zenith. It's Oasis' virtue that they bestow the common touch to the communality. F— it – anybody could be Bonehead, multitudes of Mancunians can belt it out like Liam, and Noel isn't that dab a hand with an axe.

Really Oasis are the Spice Girls of rock: five guys making the very best of the modest attributes that have been bestowed on them. And this is certainly what Earls Court were responding to on Saturday night. It may not have been the greatest rock'n'roll gig ever, but damn it all – it came close. And they are ours. God love 'em, I say.

Will Self